[Shi'hou]

576 The woman whose fiendish caterwauling had brought the wrath
562 of the tribe down on our heads, now appeared decently veiled, a large metal bowl in her hands. This was passed round the circle, each partaker making a sucking noise as he drank. It required some courage to put one's lips to the bowl after it had been licked by those bearded ruffians, but the camel's milk it contained was cool and sweet. A dish of dates, covered with flies, was next produced, and out of sheer politeness we helped ourselves to a small portion. They tasted of fermentation and were full of grit.

415 While we were seated with our strange hosts I looked around the
316 hut and noticed several pots and pans, very crudely made of a yellowish metal. Lifting one of these up, I handed it to the headman and indicated with a gesture that I should like to know what it was made of. The old man pointed to the mountains and grunted '*ga'ar*', which I found out afterwards was the *Shi'hou* word for gold. Apparently there are considerable veins of this mineral in the hills; it is smelted by the tribesmen who sell a proportion of it to the lowland Arabs, but also use it for their domestic utensils. Tin is also mined or washed in the streams.

576 When we could stand no longer the heat and stench of the hut we stood up and indicated to the headman that we should like to leave. He grinned very affably and, taking us by the hand, led us across the valley towards the crevice. The tribesmen followed, shouting and laughing and firing their rifles into the air. When we reached the top of the crevice we shook hands all round, a custom which they appeared to understand, and then thanked them in Arabic for their hospitality, which they did not understand, but which seemed to amuse them nevertheless. Just before we left them the headman unclasped his silver *hangar* from his waist and presented it to me. I have it still.

000 Our descent down the mountainside was much quicker than our ascent had been. We could hear the tribesmen's rifles cracking away in the valley, and feared that they might suddenly change their minds again and begin firing at us. Fortunately no untoward incidents occurred, apart from Stanton losing his foothold and falling twenty feet down a sharp escarpment, thereby skinning his arm from wrist to elbow. Within half an hour we had reached the base of the foothills and could see the Khan Sahib's house in the distance. The time was now five o'clock and I realized that the rest of the party would be getting somewhat impatient.

We found the Khan Sahib pacing up and down his beautiful

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

from clinging to the familiar things which form his background. 000
Thus Lawrence, who could live content on dates and honey with no company but that of simple Bedouins, resorted when on service in India to his portable gramophone and played records of the great composers' music, rather than listen enchanted t· the monotonous, reedy chant of a hillsman's pipe.

I suppose that segregation from one's womenfolk is one of the hardest privations men have to endure in the desert. The men must have missed their wives and sweethearts, and felt depressed at times by the lonely silence of the desert, when nights are hot and disturbed, and the very stars have a cold, hard glitter. Enforced continence was accepted as a matter of course by the old travellers; at least, one assumes so, for they never seem to mention the matter in their books. This may have been due to old-fashioned delicacy, but I consider that deep thinking and the zeal for exploration had sublimated the normal sex instincts. Their books are scholarly and often restrained and factual in style, so that one rarely has a glimpse of the author's true character or inner thoughts. There is seldom a reference to the most commonplace of biological facts, and one feels that, beneath the bushy beards and thick-lensed sun-glasses, there bubbled a veritable volcano of repressions.

There is no doubt that the man who decides to spend part of his life in the desert must be prepared to overcome normal desires by sublimating them in some way. Work is the most effective antidote, combined with an undiminishing interest in the people of the country, their customs and manners. When one is concerned with other people one begins to forget oneself. The weak man who transgresses the laws of Christian and Mohammedan, and violates the harem or indulges in licentious practices lays up a great store of trouble for himself. He will incur the wrath and contempt of the Arabs, the hostility of his own associates, and may easily contract one of the many terrible diseases of the desert. Gonorrhœa, syphillis, smallpox and leprosy may be the harsh rewards of illicit adventures with the Jezebels of the desert.

The women of respectable Arab families are as remote and 562 565
untouchable as an Indian prince's bride; prisoners of the harem, they are seldom seen in public, and then only in the company of their husbands and retainers, and deeply veiled. The peasant women one sees at all times of the day; they are timid, ragged creatures, about as sweet-smelling as a Malayan durian. They 514
perform their toilet on the shores of the nearest creek, squatting

dates, ground nuts, spices and ghee butter. One shop was devoted entirely to hubble-bubble pipes and we watched an old Arab carving a pipe stem. The stems, which are of bamboo, are fitted with a brass ring near the top to form a lip for the smoker, the body of the stem being delicately covered with gold and silver thread. The second stem, through which the air escapes, is of plain bamboo, engraved with Arabic designs which are carved with a red-hot knife, and then coloured with indigo. The bowl, made of unglazed pottery, has a slender neck flared at the top. These pipes cost about ten rupees each, the stems being a rupee extra.

Some of the shops are well stocked with canned goods and haberdashery from the Indian market, and one saw shelves full of sewing cotton, buttons, metal polish, brass lamps, and cheap cloth. A common sight is raw cotton, still in its pods, which is gathered from trees in the interior; untreated hemp and tobacco leaves, crudely dried. There were few carpets, and those we saw were of indifferent quality. A few of the merchants appeared to be well-off and one or two had robes of coloured silk, edged with gold thread. They had noble, intelligent faces, and one patriarch, with a snow-white beard and spotless linen *abbas*, looked out of place in that ill-assorted crowd. A large sapphire ring sparkled on his finger and his long, thin hands were those of an artist. One must be careful not to judge the Arab by Western standards, since dirt and insanitation are not abhorrent to them as they are to us. Even a cultured and fastidious Arab may have manners which would be out of place in a London drawing-room.

Apart from little girls up to ten years of age, we saw very few women, and they were heavily veiled. We walked to the little quay, which was clustered with dhows and rowing boats and watched the intense activity of shipbuilding and repairing that was in progress. The seams of the hulls are caulked with raw cotton and then covered with pitch, and the bottoms are painted with lime mixed with shark's oil, a good preservative. The upper part of the hull, above the water line, is also varnished with fish oil. Some of the sails are enormous and stretch from bows to stern, giving the dhows great speed on the water. This is necessary since they have to cover great distances, especially in the pearling season, when they may have to sail seventy miles in a single day to reach the beds.

There was quite a chilly breeze as we entered a ferryboat and were rowed across the creek, although the sun was still high above

2: Codrai G-3 (1948-1950)1950 MK1 Oman
Trucial Oman MK4

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An ancient sail-maker plies his still more ancient craft according to an unchanged design. The probabilities are that some deep-sea dhow will rely on this sail to carry its cargo of dates to Southern Arabia, East Africa or the west coast of India.

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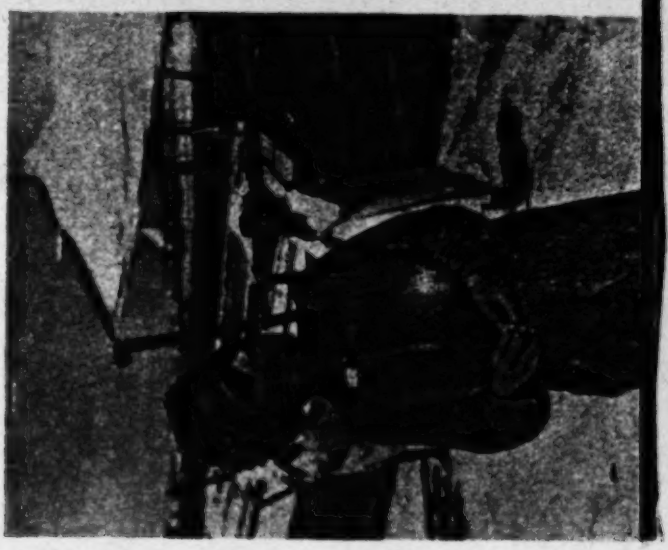

On the coast any unveiled woman is usually either a Negress or a Baluchi. Even this little girl (fascinated by an aeroplane) would probably be veiled if an Arab. The locket around her neck contains scraps from the Koran to protect her from evil spirits.

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